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SUBJECT: ELECTION 2007 TIMELINE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The first round of France's next presidential election will take place on Sunday, April 22, ¶2007. Between now and then, the nomination of their candidates by the two major parties, the composition of the (long) list of participants in the first round of the election, and the response of prospective voters' to the principal candidates' campaign pitches will be at the center of attention. This cable provides a timeline with expected events to watch for during the next seven months.

-- In October and November, the main focus will be on the center-left Socialist Party's (PS) primary election to select its presidential nominee. Poitou-Charentes Region President Segolene Royal is favored to win, and any other result would be a major upset. At the end of November, a PS party congress will officially nominate the winner of the primary election.

-- Also, in October and November, the other mainstream political party, the center-right and governing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party plans to publicize a number of wide-ranging reform proposals that its likely standard-bearer, Interior Minister and UMP party president Nicolas Sarkozy, could incorporate into his campaign platform.

-- In January, the UMP will hold a party congress of its own which is expected to nominate Sarkozy as the party's presidential candidate.

-- February and March will be the heart of France's presidential campaign season, characterized by a vast amount of televised discussion and campaign activity by the dozen-plus candidates expected to qualify for the election's first round.

-- The final list of first-round contenders will emerge only in mid-March, after prospective candidates file, with the Constitutional Council, petitions from 500 elected officials endorsing their candidacies.

-- Also in March, President Chirac will announce whether he intends to run for a third term. While very unlikely, it is not inconceivable.

-- The election's second-round run-off is scheduled for May 5, should no candidate receive more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The government of Prime Minister de Villepin has selected Sunday, April 22 and Sunday, May 5 for the two rounds of France's 2007 presidential election. A second round has been required in all of the seven presidential elections since the Constitutional reforms of 1962 provided for direct election of the president, and the 2007 election is not likely to be the first exception to this rule. The second round is a run-off between the top two scoring candidates in the first round. In the second round of the last presidential election (in 2002), of about 41 million registered voters, nearly 32 million went to the polls election day.

¶3. (SBU) There are no term-limits in France. Conceivably then, the current incumbent, 73 year-old Jacques Chirac, could run for a third term. This is widely viewed as unlikely due to Chirac's age, questions about his health (a minor stroke in 2005 limited his activities for a time), and his declining leadership credibility with the public. Even so, Chirac has been careful to keep the option open until the very end, and has said that he will announce his decision on running again in March 2007.

¶4. (SBU) Who and how many candidates will compete in the first round will be clearly established by mid-March. March 16, 2007 is the deadline for filing with the Constitutional Council the 500 endorsements from elected officials required for qualifying to appear on the first-round ballot. French law requires that within 37 days of the first-round vote, each candidate must file with the Constitutional Council signed petitions endorsing his or her candidacy for president from 500 elected officials, who must come from at least 30 of France's hundred-odd administrative departments. There are about 47,000 officials qualified to sign these endorsements. A law passed in March 2005 makes public, for the first time, the names of who endorsed whom. One result of this new law is that extremist and marginal candidates are having to do much more canvassing of elected officials to come up with 500 willing to "go public" with their endorsement. One effect of this law should be to reduce the number of "micro-candidates" who qualify to appear on the first-round ballot. In the 2002's first round there were 16 candidates in all; most observers expect that "only" about a dozen will make the cut in 2007.

#### Mainstream Parties' Nominations -----

¶5. (SBU) In October and November the main focus will be on the Socialist Party (PS) primary election. On November 16, about 200,000 PS party members will vote for one of three candidates: the favorite, Poitou-Charentes Region President Segolene Royal, former Economy Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn and former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius. If none of these candidates garners over 50 percent of the vote, the run-off will be held on November 23. In current polling figures, Royal leads by well over 50 percent; whether in one or two rounds, any result other than a Royal victory would be considered a major upset. The PS primary campaign will include three debates televised from studios (on October 17 and 24 and on November 7) and three debates before party members in different regions (currently, to be covered only by print media). If a second round run-off is necessary, an additional televised debate is scheduled for November 21. Throughout the six-week campaign period, the candidates will be crisscrossing France campaigning among socialist party members.

¶6. (SBU) Royal is seen as representing a sleeker, more contemporary version of leftist predilections. Royal, like Strauss-Kahn, steers clear of inflammatory, anti-capitalist rhetoric; their policy orientations are fundamentally social-democratic. Fabius, on the other hand -- despite his long record of moderate economic policy-making as both economy minister and prime minister -- has espoused for this

campaign sharply anti-market, traditionally leftist, policy positions.

¶7. (SBU) Interior Minister and UMP President Nicolas Sarkozy is widely assumed to be a shoo-in for his party's presidential nomination. The UMP's nominee will be elected by a special party congress scheduled for January 14, 2007. The date of the congress was moved forward from February 4, 2007 after President Chirac declared on September 18 that he would be announcing if he would run for re-election "in March 2007." Nearly all expect the UMP congress in January to nominate Sarkozy.

¶8. (SBU) Other center-right candidacies cannot be entirely ruled out. Chirac could announce a bid for a third term as late as mid-March (the deadline for filing to appear on the ballot in the first round), though few expect Chirac to try for a third term. In a recent move intended to force potential challengers to declare themselves early, Sarkozy engineered a modification of party rules which requires that candidacies to be put before the January party congress be declared before the end of November. Sarkozy's potential rivals in the party are unlikely to feel bound by this rule, and could easily challenge it at the eleventh hour -- particularly if unforeseen developments should give them a real chance of challenging Sarkozy for the nomination. In addition, under French electoral law, all that is required to qualify to run are the 500 endorsements from elected officials. Theoretically then, a candidate like Chirac, for example, could run without the nomination of his own political party. In addition, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin has not completely abandoned his (faded) presidential hopes, and Defense Minister Michelle Alliot-Marie continues edging towards a candidacy, making very clear she is "available" as an alternative to Sarkozy.

#### And Minor Parties' Nominations

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¶9. (SBU) France's plethora of minor political parties will also be selecting their candidates and promoting their platforms between now and the end of the year. The extremist, right-wing National Front (FN) will hold its presidential convention in mid-October. It is a foregone conclusion that FN founder and party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen (who came in second in the first round of the 2002 presidential election) will be the FN's candidate. Frustration with the political process runs high in France; the ensuing "protest vote" garnered Le Pen nearly 17 percent of the total votes cast in the first round in 2002. In 2007, uninspiring performances by mainstream candidates could again prompt a surprisingly strong showing by Le Pen, though few expect that he will manage to "ambush" the establishment a second time, and make it into the second round.

¶10. (SBU) Notwithstanding its long, and respectable, history of pro-American, anti-Communist governance during the first decades of the Cold War, the centrist, Union for French Democracy (UDF) has become a minor party. The UDF's leader, Francois Bayrou, is perennially hopeful that divisions in center-right and center-left could push his vote totals into double digits -- which in a first-round election with over a dozen candidates is a respectable showing. The Communist Party (PC) will also nominate a candidate in October -- as will nearly a dozen other parties on the far left and the far right. Extremist parties in France traditionally receive a far higher percentage of the vote than in other advanced democracies. In 2002, the far right (19.2 percent) and the far left (13.8 percent) combined took 33 percent of the vote, leaving a half-dozen mainstream and environmentalist parties to battle over the remainder.

¶11. (SBU) On the far left, the legendary firebrand, and head of the (Trotskyist) Workers Struggle (LO), Arlette Laguiller (who was France's first woman presidential candidate, in 1974, and has run in every presidential election since), will again be her party's nominee. Laguillier came in fifth in 2002 with nearly 6 percent of the vote, behind the

representatives of France's three mainstream parties (PS, UDF, and UMP), and Le Pen. (Comment: The French themselves are unsure of whether they should be perversely proud, or dumbfoundedly dismayed, at the way a leading democracy such as their own still manages to field not one, but two, Trotskyist presidential candidates in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. The other, in addition to Laguillier, who also ran in 2002 and intends to run again in 2007, is telegenic postal service employee Olivier Besancenot of the Communist Revolutionary League (LCR). End Comment.) Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:  
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